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Turning off the Music

📅 August 7, 2016 📄 Articles (<http://westviewnews.org/articles/>), Arts and Culture

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By Sheldon Krinsky, Ph.D.

Just imagine the West Village without its music—the jazz clubs, Washington Square Park musicians, the folk houses, open mikes. It would be like spring

without flowers and songbirds. And what can we say about a malevolent force that would eradicate one of the Village's revered cultural institutions?



KEEP THE MUSIC AND PERFORMANCES ALIVE! The threat to expel Caffè Vivaldi from its home on Jones Street continues. Photo by Darielle Smolian.

For thirty years Caffè Vivaldi has brought performers to a setting of uncharacteristic intimacy to entertain audiences from all over the world, even Upper East Siders. Professional musicians delight in performing pro bono and, like the amateurs, pass around the hat. Others come from dual lives—financial analysts in the morning and jazz musicians at night.

Vivaldi has hosted many notable events. Joseph Brodsky, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature gave interviews at the Caffè. Al Pacino directed parts of his semi-autobiographical film (not the Godfather) Chinese Coffee at Vivaldi. Woody

Allen shot scenes there for three of his films. And while far less notable, I had a book launching that involved theatrical readings, a scientist rap-artist and indie music. Where else could this be done?

The threat to expel Vivaldi from its home on Jones Street began in 2011, when a notorious landlord who owns 140 apartment buildings increased the rent by over 300 percent. After a groundswell of support from patrons and performers, and nearly 5,000 petitioners, the prospect of adverse publicity prompted a rent renegotiation. It allowed Vivaldi to continue to stay open once changes were made to increase revenues. A fundraiser helped the Caffè to install soundproofing so it could play live music during later hours. The contract was signed in January 2012 and it gave the Caffè access to the basement for storage and for the possibility of annex space for artists. The landlord refused to give the Caffè access to the basement and requested additional rent for the inaccessible space.

The landlord took the owner of Vivaldi to court to extract the rent for the basement. This of course was a financial drain on the owner, who fortunately had some legal angels to help him stay open. Judge Lynne R. Kotler of the New York State Civil Court heard the case on February 27, 2013. She declared Caffè Vivaldi to be a “cultural institution” and dismissed the landlord’s case for additional rent claiming that the owner was “partially evicted” from the leased space.

It did not end there. Defying the court order, the landlord continued to prevent the owner from getting access to the basement. The owner took another course and used every inch of space on the ground floor so he was not dependent on the basement. The landlord,

nonetheless, demanded rent for the basement that was legally provided under the contract but was not used, and delivered eviction notices to eliminate the Caffè.

New Yorkers may remember a front page picture in

the **Daily News** of the Vivaldi landlord

handcuffed and arrested on 20 felony counts, including grand larceny, business record falsification and tax and mortgage fraud. <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/manhattan/nyc-landlord-steve-croman-arrested-threatening-tenants-article-1.2629980>

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Another court date is scheduled in the near future. Once again West Villagers, patrons, musicians and friends of Vivaldi are signing a petition that will be forwarded to the Supreme Court Judge. You can sign on to the petition by going to the site: http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/pledge-support-for-caffe.fb52?source=c.fb&r_by=15879826

(http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/pledge-support-for-caffe.fb52?source=c.fb&r_by=15879826)

Keep the music and performances alive!

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